

Moses and Aaron Confront Pharaoh (late 1447 BC)

Exodus 5:1–6:9

Moses and Aaron Go to Pharaoh

5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Release my people so that they may hold a pilgrim feast to me in the desert.’”
2 But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD that I should obey him by releasing Israel? I do not know the LORD, and I will not release Israel!”
3 And they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Let us go a three-day journey into the desert so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, so that he does not strike us with plague or the sword.”
4 The king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you cause the people to refrain from their work? Return to your labor!”
5 Pharaoh was thinking, “The people of the land are now many, and you are giving them rest from their labor.”

Pharaoh Responds By Making the Israelites Work Even Harder

6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the slave masters and foremen who were over the people:
7 “You must no longer give straw to the people for making bricks as before. Let them go and collect straw for themselves.
8 But you must require of them the same quota of bricks that they were making before. Do not reduce it, for they are slackers. That is why they are crying, ‘Let us go sacrifice to our God.’
9 Make the work harder for the men so they will keep at it and pay no attention to lying words!”
10 So the slave masters of the people and their foremen went to the Israelites and said, “Thus says Pharaoh: ‘I am not giving you straw.
11 You go get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it, because there will be no reduction at all in your workload.’”
12 So the people spread out through all the land of Egypt to collect stubble for straw.
13 The slave masters were pressuring them, saying, “Complete your work for each day, just like when there was straw!”
14 The Israelite foremen whom Pharaoh’s slave masters had set over them were beaten and were asked, “Why did you not complete your requirement for brickmaking as in the past—both yesterday and today?”
15 The Israelite foremen went and cried out to Pharaoh, “Why are you treating your servants this way?
16 No straw is given to your servants, but we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are even being beaten, but the fault is with your people.”
17 But Pharaoh replied, “You are slackers! Slackers! That is why you are saying, ‘Let us go sacrifice to the LORD.’
18 So now, get back to work! You will not be given straw, but you must still produce your quota of bricks!”

The Israelites Berate Moses

19 The Israelite foremen saw that they were in trouble when they were told, “You must not reduce the daily quota of your bricks.”
20 When they went out from Pharaoh, they encountered Moses and Aaron standing there to meet them,
21 and they said to them, “May the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the opinion of Pharaoh and his servants, so that you have given them an excuse to kill us!”

Moses Complains to Yahweh

22 Moses returned to the LORD, and said, “Lord, why have you caused trouble for this people? Why did you ever send me?
23 From the time I went to speak to Pharaoh in your name, he has caused trouble for this people, and you have certainly not rescued them!”
6:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for compelled by my strong hand he will release them, and by my strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”
2 God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD.
3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name ‘the LORD’ I was not known to them.
4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as resident foreigners.
5 I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.
6 Therefore, tell the Israelites, ‘I am the LORD. I will bring you out from your enslavement to the Egyptians, I will rescue you from the hard labor they impose, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.
7 I will take you to myself for a people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from your enslavement to the Egyptians.
8 I will bring you to the land I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob—and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD!’”
9 Moses told this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and hard labor.

Israel's First Rebellion (late 1447 BC)

Ezekiel 20:5–9

5 and say to them: “This is what the sovereign LORD says: On the day I chose Israel I swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made myself known to them in the land of Egypt. I swore to them, “I am the LORD your God.”

6 On that day I swore to bring them out of the land of Egypt to a land which I had picked out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands.

7 I said to them, “Each of you must get rid of the detestable idols you keep before you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.”

8 But they rebelled against me, and refused to listen to me; no one got rid of their detestable idols, nor did they abandon the idols of Egypt. Then I decided to pour out my rage on them and fully vent my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

9 I acted for the sake of my reputation, so that I would not be profaned before the nations among whom they lived, before whom I revealed myself by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

A Renewed Call to Action (early 1446 BC)

Exodus 6:10–30

Yahweh Sends Moses and Aaron Back to Pharaoh

10 Then the LORD said to Moses,

11 “Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt that he must release the Israelites from his land.”

12 But Moses replied to the LORD, “If the Israelites did not listen to me, then how will Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with difficulty?”

Excursus—Genealogy of Moses and Aaron

13 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge for the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt.

14 These are the heads of their fathers’ households: The sons of Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel, were Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. These were the clans of Reuben.

15 The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These were the clans of Simeon.

16 Now these are the names of the sons of Levi, according to their records: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. (The length of Levi’s life was 137 years.)

17 The sons of Gershon, by their families, were Libni and Shimei.

18 The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. (The length of Kohath’s life was 133 years.)

19 The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These were the clans of Levi, according to their records.

20 Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses. (The length of Amram’s life was 137 years.)

21 The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zikri.

22 The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

23 Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

24 The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite clans.

25 Now Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers’ households of Levi according to their clans.

26 It was the same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, “Bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt by their regiments.”

27 They were the men who were speaking to Pharaoh king of Egypt, in order to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the same Moses and Aaron.

Recapitulation of Command to Return

28 When the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt,

29 he said to him, “I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I am telling you.”

30 But Moses said before the LORD, “Since I speak with difficulty, why should Pharaoh listen to me?”

Moses' and Aaron's Second Confrontation With Pharaoh (early 1446 BC)

Exodus 7:1–13

1 So the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.

2 You are to speak everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh that he must release the Israelites from his land.

3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and although I will multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt,
 4 Pharaoh will not listen to you. I will reach into Egypt and bring out my regiments, my people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with great acts of judgment.
 5 Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I extend my hand over Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them.
 6 And Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them.
 7 Now Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh.
 8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron,
 9 "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Do a miracle,' and you say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' it will become a snake."
 10 When Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, they did so, just as the LORD had commanded them—Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants and it became a snake.
 11 Then Pharaoh also summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the magicians of Egypt by their secret arts did the same thing. [2 Tim 3:8]
 12 Each man threw down his staff, and the staffs became snakes. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.
 13 Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had predicted.

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Chronological Notes

- 1) The rebellion of Israel mentioned in Ezekiel 20:5–9¹ is presented here as part of the Exodus narrative. That this rebellion occurred in Egypt itself, prior to the crossing of the Red Sea, is seen in v. 8 where God was determined to “vent my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt” (Ezek 20:8).² In light of this, it seems likely that the plagues were not meant for Pharaoh and the Egyptians alone—indeed, there is no indication that Goshen was spared from the first three plagues. It is only in the fourth plague that a distinction was made between the Israelites and the Egyptians (Exod 8:22–23). This distinction, although not explicitly referenced in the following narrative (it's missing in the sixth and eighth plagues), seems to have continued throughout the remaining plagues.
- 2) The Pharaoh of the Exodus.³
 - A) When Moses returned to Egypt, he and Aaron spoke to the new king, Amenhotep II. This powerful and militaristic monarch conducted a major campaign in Canaan in his third year (ca. 1450) and another in his seventh (ca. 1446). His seventh year coincides with the traditional date of the exodus, 1446, and one cannot help but wonder if the decimation of Pharaoh's army at the Sea of Reeds might not have followed this second campaign, and had such a demoralizing impact as to discourage further immediate adventurism, especially to the north.
 - B) Our identification of Amenhotep II as the pharaoh of the exodus is supported by two other considerations. First, although most of the kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty made their principal residence at Thebes, far to the south of the Israelites in the Delta, Amenhotep was at home in Memphis and apparently reigned from there much of the time. This placed him in close proximity to the land of Goshen and made him readily accessible to Moses and Aaron. Second, the best understanding suggests that Amenhotep's power did not pass to his eldest son but rather to Thutmose IV, a younger son. This is at least implied in the so-called dream stela found at the base of the Great Sphinx near Memphis. This text, which records a dream in which Thutmose IV was promised that he would one day be king, suggests, as one historian says, that his reign came about “through an unforeseen turn of fate, such as the premature death of an elder brother.” It is impossible to prove, but one cannot help but speculate as to whether this premature death was not caused by the judgment of Yahweh, who in the tenth plague struck dead all the firstborn of Egypt, who were unprotected by the blood of the Passover, “from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon” (Exod 12:29).

¹ Other references that mention Israel's idolatry while in Egypt include: Leviticus 17:7; Ezekiel 23:3, 8, 19; Joshua 24:14.

² Keil & Delitzsch comment: “It is true that there is nothing expressly stated in the Pentateuch as to the refusal of the Israelites to obey the command of God, or their unwillingness to give up idolatry in Egypt; but it may be inferred from the statements contained in Ex. 6:9 and 12...” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Ezekiel Daniel,” *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 154). See also Steven Tuell's comments on Ezekiel 20:5–9 (Steven Tuell, “Ezekiel,” *UBCS*, 128).

³ Sourced from Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Second Edition, (Baker Publishing, 2008), 80.

Textual Notes

1) Genealogy of Moses.

